

**Conclusions of the High-Level Roundtable
on Fostering Social Integration
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1. While in most cases the goals of social integration are easily agreed, the means to achieve it have not received sufficient consideration. There should be greater coherence between principles and practice, and fostering social integration requires more effective social policies. How policies are formulated and implemented is as important as what they aim to achieve and can significantly affect their success. The challenge is to reinstate the concepts of social integration at the centre of all policies and to find practical ways and means to achieve a “society for all”.
 2. There is disappointment, ten years after Copenhagen, at the extent to which commitments have been implemented. A return to a people-centred approach is required, with policies focused on improving the social and economic conditions of all people, particularly in developing countries. There is a sense of a rift between efforts to achieve the MDGs and implementation of the broader Copenhagen commitments. It is essential to overcome this rift, as the processes are essentially two sides of the same coin. The concepts of social integration developed at Copenhagen should be mainstreamed into efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Issues and concerns

3. Social integration is a prerequisite for social development. The concept of “being left out” is a recurring theme and a barrier to social development. Equality of opportunity is crucial to social integration and “a society for all”. Achieving a “society for all” means ensuring that all members of society enjoy full and equal participation. Investing in social cohesion and social development is a good, solid and productive investment and not simply a cost.
4. Poverty must be eradicated. An integrated approach must be pursued where economic policies promote employment and reduce inequality. Employment is vital for fostering social integration, and access to employment and decent work empowers individuals and leads to social inclusion. Discrimination in hiring leads to disenfranchisement and social exclusion.
5. Globalization provides advantages and encourages social development in some cases, yet has also led to greater social exclusion, as the pace of change and progress is different in different place and some workers have difficulties competing.

6. Education is vitally important in providing people the skills to engage in productive employment and to participate in society, in reducing prejudice and discrimination and increasing tolerance. The education of girls is particularly important for social integration, and yields the highest return on investment in developing countries. Benefits include wage gains for women, increases in national per capita income growth, and healthier, better educated children. Several policies are conducive to increasing enrolment of girls and improving their education level; it is therefore now a question of political will to introduce and implement these policies.

7. Achieving gender equality is fundamental for social development. Because of discrimination, women have less access to employment, education, health care and other services. Gender mainstreaming – which concerns the rights and responsibilities of both women and men – should be further developed and implemented, and women need to be fully protected against discrimination, violence and disease. Maternal mortality remains a pressing concern in developing countries. In these countries, young married women are increasingly infected by HIV/AIDS, mainly contracting the disease from their husbands.

8. In many countries, groups with special needs continue to be marginalized in the political process, although increasingly since Copenhagen these groups don't wait to be included but insist on it.

9. Increasingly, older persons constitute large proportions of national populations and their numbers are rising worldwide. While older persons are increasingly active, the ageing of societies will have profound effects on social integration and social solidarity. Current systems for financing pensions and long-term care will prove unsustainable, and future generations of older persons may not fare as well as today's older persons if changes are not introduced. Pension reform, on the agenda of many countries, may be particularly painful and could affect intergenerational solidarity implicitly or explicitly reflected in political conflicts.

10. Ensuring the social integration of persons with disabilities requires legal instruments that protect them from discrimination while ensuring their rights and guaranteeing equal opportunities in society. It also includes creating an environment that respects their desire to stay with families and reside within the communities of their choice with the maximum possible independence.

11. The family, as a time-tested institution, is essential for facilitating social inclusion. Families, however, have faced tremendous pressures and undergone significant changes. The skills needed to sustain a family are not something that can be assumed – for example, it cannot be assumed that men and women know how to be parents.

12. Immigrants, refugees and displaced persons are often excluded. Legal protections and skills enhancement are important for their social inclusion and integration.

13. Public health policy can directly influence social development and combat poverty. Universal access to public health can also reduce social exclusion. Investments in health are therefore important for social integration and equality. At the same time, social policies and investments contribute to improving public health. Improvements in health conditions are not the result of medical interventions alone, but also involve improvements in social and environmental conditions.

14. Civil society is vital for social development, particularly in promoting a people-centered focus. Local civil society groups work directly with people who are excluded and in need, and are often able to ensure that those who need support have access to it and know where to get it. Therefore, greater attention should be given to civil society groups as partners in promoting social integration and social development. Civil society needs support to continue and improve the work it does. Focus must be put on how the sector can be expanded and strengthened so that it is better able to participate and advocate and more effective in doing so.

15. Governments alone won't make the total difference, and neither will civil society alone. They must, therefore, work together in partnership. While the importance of civil society was greatly recognized in Copenhagen, and many Governments are working in partnership with NGOs and other civil society organizations, the relationship needs constant attention and continuous improvement. In particular, it is important to create mechanisms, networks and institutions through which Governments and civil society organizations can build consensus and improve their work together. The private sector is also an important partner for social integration and development, not only out of altruism and on humanitarian ground but it is also in its direct interest that poverty is eliminated and vulnerable groups are integrated into mainstream societies.

Recommendations

16. Governments should ensure equal treatment for all people and equal access to goods and services for all. There may be a need for affirmative action to enable those people who have suffered from discrimination or exclusion to participate equally.

17. Fostering social integration requires ensuring security and social justice; access to social services and social protection; overcoming barriers and prejudice; teaching tolerance; combating discrimination and ensuring gender equality. It also requires:

? **improved public administration**, including democratic governance and the rule of law; stable and transparent institutions that guarantee and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and allow and encourage broad-based participation. Policies should be based on a principle of non-discrimination. Social integration is cross-cutting and requires a holistic policy approach. Governments should improve coordination among ministries and departments, to overcome sectorial approaches and competition, so that governance structures become more flexible and responsive to current challenges. Decentralization of authority to local governments, with allocation of sufficient resources, is key to ensuring more participatory decision making.

? **integrated economic and social goals and policies:** there is still a tendency for many governments to focus mainly on promoting economic growth, but if social concerns are left out economic growth may actually lead to greater social disparities, polarization and exclusion.

? **partnership:** The role of the state should continue to evolve. Policy development and implementation requires consultation with all stakeholders, based on healthy dialogue, partnership, respect and a long-term perspective. Governments should create the necessary regulatory framework for cooperation with civil society and other partners, including the private sector, so that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Governments should act as facilitators to strengthen civil society. Support should be given to the organizations that people create themselves and networks of these organizations should be strengthened.

? **recognition of the importance of the home environment** for the care and well being that it affords to family members. Families can serve to integrate and support vulnerable members, but they must have the resources, skills and knowledge to fulfill this function. The rights of all family members must be respected if families are to function effectively.

? **resources:** for continued investment in the social sectors. The private sector should be encouraged to make investments in social sectors. Civil society organizations also need support to carry out programmes.

? **provision of greater resources for girls' education,** including ensuring free and universal access to quality education, community-based and supported schools that are "girl-friendly" with regard to sanitation facilities, female teachers and curricula; and provision of scholarships

? **stressing the importance of volunteerism** as a mechanism to develop social capital, support social integration and overcome social exclusion. Volunteering provides a way for people to develop social and vocational skills, to participate in society and to contribute to their own and their community's well being. Such active participation and involvement develops a sense of ownership of development programmes so badly needed to achieve overall success.

? **improved international cooperation,** including strengthening of the **Commission for Social Development,** which has done a good job in promoting and developing further the social integration consensus of Copenhagen. The Commission remains the essential place for all countries to come together to discuss these issues, and its work and agenda on issues of social cohesion should be expanded and strengthened. It is important to identify examples of good practices and policy approaches so that these may be shared among all countries. This sharing of experiences is one positive aspect of intergovernmental cooperation.

? **increased development assistance for activities that promote social development.**

18. It appears that the social integration component of social development has lost ground, that the goal has not been fully integrated into the general development discourse outside social development circles. The important principle of solidarity among peoples, societies and nations has eroded. We must all reconsider our fundamental commitment to the equality of every human being. While we accept the notion in principle, how do we live it in everyday life? Without an acceptance of the fundamental equality of every person, there is no basis for solidarity and no hope for social integration.